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A FOURTH
DIALOGUE
CONCERNING
LIBERTY;
CONTAINING AN
EXPOSITION
OF THE FALSITY OF THE
FIRST and Leading PRINCIPLES
OF THE PRESENT
REVOLUTIONISTS IN EUROPE.

By JACKSON BARWIS, Esq.

Il est vrai que, dans les Démocraties, le Peuple paroît faire ce qu'il veut ; mais la Liberté Politique ne consiste point à faire ce que l'on veut.—Dans un Etat, c'est-à-dire, dans une Société où il y a des Loix, la Liberté ne peut consister qu'à pouvoir faire ce que l'on doit vouloir, & à n'être point contraint de faire ce que l'on ne doit pas vouloir.

MONTESQUIEU, Tome I. p. 255.

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Liberty
An Essay
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DIALOGUE IV,

POLITICAL Liberty, for the last twenty years, has been the subject of continual discussion; and there has, doubtless, been much light thrown on it by its numerous advocates and friends, and even by its enemies.

But as it frequently and unfortunately happens, that the best things are spoiled, and the best intentions defeated, through intemperate zeal; which determines the mind before it understands its object, and which hurries it to conclusions before it has examined principles; it is hoped that the following Dialogue may have a tendency to abate such zeal, and to reduce the mind to that temper which is

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indispensably necessary in the investigation and comprehension of truth. Certain it is that so many voluminous works could never have been written on morals and politics, had the *same ideas* been affixed to the *same words*, by the numerous competitors for literary fame.

It is now, seventeen years ago, since a friend of mine attempted a correct definition of the moral and political meaning of the word *Liberty*, in several conversations which were conveyed to the public in three Dialogues. A fourth is now produced, rather reluctantly, as my friend seemed to think enough had been said in the three former.

Being on a visit at his agreeable retirement in the country; according to our usual custom, we took our walks, and held our conversation, of which he always

has

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has an inexhaustible fund. We long amused ourselves with general observations on what had been said, written, and done, in these days of revolutions: when, perceiving that he was not at all satisfied either with the doctrines or practices of the leading Champions of the day, in the cause of *Liberty*, I drew him at length to explain himself, to nearly the following purport.

Far be it from my thoughts, said he, to impute blame to any of the *true friends* of Liberty; having, you know, always shewn myself ambitious of being enrolled among them. But it must be considered as of the greatest importance to *the cause*, that we clearly and truly understand each other; and that, by the word *Liberty*, we signify the *same ideas, the same thoughts, and the same intentions*; and that we do

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not entertain *very various*, but even *very opposite ideas*; and which may extend to *licentiousness*.—I assented.—For moral and political words, continued he, are so indefinitely used, that men do not easily understand each other. Hence that eternal writing and reasoning on the *same subjects*: and hence too false eloquence derives her authority, and rules with magic force the illiterate and gaping multitude. But in the search of truth, her falsties must be detected and exposed, and her florid and delusive vanities must be thrown aside; not merely as worthless, but as destructive to the native simplicity of truth.

Amidst the fanciful and endless imaginations of the mind, unsubdued and uncorrected by a pure affection for nature, and for truth; every moral and political
word

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word has a thousand shades of meaning, and admits of innumerable combinations; which, under the direction of *a vain and disingenuous wit*, throws a perpetual and almost impenetrable obscurity around the plainest and most undeniable truths.—Certainly, said I; but proceed.

There can be no just reasoning, continued he, where this *variegated verbosity* prevails. If we desire to obtain any real knowledge, our ideas must be founded on some *real existences* in nature; our words must be accurately defined, and all epithets, similes, allusions, and figurative expressions of every kind, must be read with a very jealous eye: if it were not that most readers like *amusement*, much better than *knowledge*, words could not pass so currently, and with so little attention to their relative signification.

A few

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A few words, which have been employed by the several competitors in the present great controversy concerning *Liberty*, from the want of being accurately defined, or from being totally incapable of definition, on account of their representing *no ideas derived from any existence in nature*; have been the causes of much error and falsehood, and most certainly tend to much practical mischief.—I am all attention, said I.

The word *Sovereignty*, continued he, as used by a late French writer*, to signify *the supreme power*, or *will* of a whole nation *collectively*; and as perceived, felt, and understood by a whole nation, as if it had but *one mind*; has doubtless not the least foundation in nature; and is a most ridiculous and fanatical imagination.

To

* J. J. Rousseau.

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To endeavour to prove its falsity any otherwise than by desiring any cool-headed man of common sense, to consider only the many thousands of men that must have fallen under his own observation, who never had the least thought, or idea, of this *imaginary sovereignty*, were only to waste his time, and exercise his mind on a mere metaphysical non-entity. —It seems so indeed, but I will not interrupt you at present, said I.

Several English *writers and talkers* use the words, *the People*, in the same, or very nearly the same sense; as if there really did exist a sort of *mental union*, and a *superiority in the people*, to whose wisdom, and knowledge of human interests, and human happiness, the best, and the greatest men that ever assisted in the government of nations, ought to think

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think themselves *so much inferior*, as always to submit not only to the *wisdom*, but to *the will of the people*.

The words, *the People*, when thus employed, convey *no idea* derived from any thing really existent in nature. For the minds of millions of men of various capacities, from the lowest degree of understanding to the highest, never can be so concentrated, nor their thoughts so nearly identical, as to form united, correct, and perfect ideas, concerning the general interests and happiness of nations.

Those who entertain such wild and extravagant *notions**, must be regardless of facts unchangeable in human nature, and

* By *notions*, he means confused ideas, or ideas not derivable from any things existing in nature.

and of every moment's experience; and of the contradictory evidence of the histories of all nations and ages. Where have we read, or where do we now find, any confirmation of any such *notions* founded on facts?

Our daily and continual experience cannot but impress our minds with a conviction of the *real inability* of the generality of men to undertake and execute, with propriety and energy, with judgment and success, the great moral and political interests of nations, and of mankind.

Is not a great capacity in the sciences, and in the arts, considered as *extraordinary*, and above the reach of common men? And is not *true genius*, exerted in beautiful and laudable pursuits, *so rare* as to be the subject of continual admiration

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and praise of all those who are *capable* of feeling the full force of its powerful influence ? And how few are they who are so capable !

If these things be true, and if great abilities be so *uncommon*, and true genius *so rare*, and yet so necessary in the comprehension and successful conduct of the greatest of human affairs ; how can it be reconciled with any degree of common sense, to contend that the whole body of *the people collectively*, in any nation, are more capable of judging and of acting for the interest and felicity of the whole nation, than those among them of the most distinguished understanding and integrity ? But, as we have shewn before, the *notion* of such a *collected wisdom in nations*, or of a *collection of the minds of a whole people, politically capable of thought, or of unity of mind,*

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mind, or of rational consent in action, is a total impossibility in our nature, as it has been formed by infinite wisdom.

Therefore the words *Sovereignty*, and *the People*, when *thus* employed, are contradictory to nature, and clearly defective in point of truth; and can have but a merely imaginary signification.

Yet they have been so employed by men whose abilities will not be disputed, and to the most mischievous and cruel purposes; and we cannot but lament (what would be ridiculous, if it were not for the fatal consequences) that they have suffered their enthusiastic zeal to run so high as, like the combatants in religious controversies, to carry them out of all sight of truth, or possibility; and have exhibited to the world, that raging fanaticism among philosophers and politicians,

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will shortly, perhaps, be no less common, than it has been formerly among divines. But it should seem, Heaven has so ordained it, that men must always be fanatical about something.

Well, said I; but what is the conclusion you mean to draw from all this?

I mean, answered he, to shew that *these words* not only represent *no ideas derivable from any facts in nature*, but that what *notions* their authors intend them to represent *are false and impossible*: and we must conclude also, that all reasonings and conclusions founded on them, so intended to be understood, must be false; and must have a pernicious tendency in the search of political truth; and prove ultimately *destructive* of that *true Liberty*, which, it is hoped, they were intended to establish.

It

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It is *destructive*, by fomenting and exciting the ruinous boldness of ignorance, and the hardened injustice of profligacy ; which being once in action and armed with power, *genuine Liberty* is disgraced and vilified by the *Licentiousness* and ferocity of ungovernable passions and brutal appetites. Indeed all falsties, when called in to the aid of truth, which wants them not, will always ultimately produce pernicious consequences in the pursuit of any laudable object.

Though I cannot but think you reason justly, said I ; yet I must confess you surprise me, because being, as I am sure you are, *a true friend to Liberty, and the natural Rights of Mankind*, you seem to me, in these observations, not to take the most favourable side for *the people*. In short,

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short, you seem to be rather against them,
Is it not so?

No! no! believe me, my dear friend,
it is *a true regard for the rights and
liberties of my country, and of all mankind,*
that creates in me such fear of error, and
such solicitude for truth. If a man ever
desire to understand any truth, he must
take no *side* in reasoning.

I shall never change my affection for
that *true Liberty*, which, *founded on justice,*
has the greatest tendency to be productive
of the general happiness of nations, and
of all mankind. But if we desire to
reason, and to act, in conformity with a
well-founded affection, we must beware
of *false principles*, and of hasty and over-
weening passions. We cannot be too
cautious, nor too fearful of errors, in
fixing our political principles; because
such

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such ruinous and dreadful consequences sometimes follow from such errors, as every wise or good man would shudder to load his conscience with.

Indeed, replied I, it is a very serious matter ; and I must confess, before a man sets up for a politician, he ought to give himself a most severe examination, as to the correctness of his principles, and the clearness and extent of his understanding. For my part, I already feel my deficiency, and therefore request the favour of farther information.

Do you, then, think *the people incapable* of forming constitutions, and of erecting governments ; and of directing, regulating, and controuling them, so as may prove most for their own interest and happiness ?

You

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You know, answered he, that the words, *the People*, we have already proved to have been *falsely* applied as representatives of *impossible* ideas of unity. But if, by *the people*, you mean those who constitute the greater body of every nation (with the exception of a few individuals) certainly they are *naturally incapable* of comprehending the general interests of mankind, or of forming just constitutions, or of duly executing the great functions of political governments, with that energy and address which is necessary to their own prosperity and felicity.

Are we then to conclude, demanded I, that all those phrases which are so flattering, and *seem to be* so favourable to Liberty, are either false, or improper? such as, *the majesty of the people, the*
sovereign

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sovereignty of the people, the will of the people, or any other phrase that implies the mental superiority of the people.

Certainly, replied he, all phrases which imply the *mental superiority of the people collectively*, over a highly-gifted and thinly-dispersed *few*, which are always to be found in all nations, are falsties that must be obvious to any man of but moderate information, and cool reflexion. But we know well enough, that such *licentious phrases* are only to be found in the vocabulary of the *weak*, the *wicked*, the *discontented*, and the *seditious*. *The safety of the people, the happiness of the people, and the just liberty of the people*, are the sort of phrases or toasts that ought to come out of the mouth of a true citizen, and lover of his country.

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From

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From the earliest ages, continued he, we have heard of *law-givers*. We are taught from the early histories of every nation, that they had *law-givers*. Even the nations most favoured and admired on account of the liberty they enjoyed, tell us of their *law-givers*, who formed constitutions and laws for them; which, it should seem, they were *incapable* of forming for themselves. And in the execution of the laws, in conformity to their various constitutions (for their constitutions were very various*), *a few* pre-eminent individuals were always *necessarily* found at the head of affairs: *necessarily*, because the natural incapacity of a *people collectively*, is felt so sensibly by themselves, that

* The great Revolutionist admits of but one constitution. England has none, he says.

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that they cannot resist the impulse by which they are moved to submit themselves to *wiser Chiefs*, and to seek protection against their own imbecillity and rashness, under *leaders* whom they hope and believe to be wiser and abler than themselves. Such human nature has been, is, and will be, we may safely prophesy, to the end of time.

That those who, under the forms of any constitution, are raised to the executive power, may not be *perfect instruments* of execution in their several departments, will always be a probability, considering the infirmities of men : and that they may sometimes be nearly the very reverse of what they ought to be, we have had, in all times, but too many convincing proofs, however they may have arrived at their elevated stations :

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whether by the nomination of *the one*, or of *the few*, or by the election of *the many*: and *the people*, (meaning only as to their incapacity) however ill they may have been treated, however deceived, misled, or abused, by their executive officers of government, they still have no resource in their own wisdom: which ever way they turn themselves, it will be only changing *one set* of superiors, for *another*, with the hope of being more fortunate in the last.

But if, from tyranny, injustice, and wrongs of all kinds, which violate the natural feelings of men, they be roused to seek refuge *by force*, and by a *total overthrow* of their constitution, and form of government; yet they can only exhibit *force* with unregulated indignation and vengeance: they must still have their
few

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few pre-eminent men to direct and controul their fury, and to instruct and guide them in their revolt. They understand nothing *collectively*, but the violences done to their *feelings* as men ; and their revenge generally falls on a few individuals whom they either know to be, or suppose to be, the causes of them : but when once they are excited or provoked to exert their irrational and tumultuous violence, all good and peaceable men must have reason to dread the effects of their brutal injustice, and ungovernable ferocity ; and must lament the cruel necessity of contending *by force* to reduce them again to a rational obedience to justice, and to the laws of their country. They are formed to be governed, because (such is the divine will) their imbecillity unfits them for the government of themselves.

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selves. For, in the destruction of one constitution and government, and in the formation and execution of another, whatever it may be, or however much it may vary from any ever constituted before; whatever happiness they may enjoy under it more than other nations enjoy, we must look, for the explication of such advantageous effects, to the superior capacity and energy of mind, the wisdom, justice, and fortitude of the more eminent men among them. *The people* can only lend their *force* to be directed and conducted by minds capable of universal views, and which lead to the general felicity of a nation ; but which *that people collectively* never could have conceived or acquired for themselves ; and the true principles of which they never clearly understood, though they can *feel*
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DIALOGUE IV. 23

the advantages of a more favourable situation.

Though you seem to advance, said I, what cannot easily be denied, yet I do not very readily perceive *the drift* of these arguments, however I may feel *the force* of them: nor can I at all reconcile them to what you have formerly advanced on the subject of Liberty; where, speaking of a *supposed* real* or implied political compact, you have given every argument in favour of the people, and against the pretensions and personal interests of the contracting executive magistrates.

But now you endeavour to prove the total inability of *the people collectively* to understand *the enlarged morality of politics*

* Second Dialogue.

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tics, and consequently to understand the true nature of any such compact.

Your observation, replied he, may probably have more weight in it than may be creditable to my understanding, or to my manner of explaining myself. But it ought to be considered, that I spoke on the *supposition of a compact*, which I do not believe hath ever *naturally* taken place; but that, if it ever had taken place, in justice to human nature, I endeavoured to shew *what it must have been, or what it ought to have been*; for, most certainly, all personal pretensions, injurious to the general interests of the liberty and felicity of mankind, must ever be indefensible upon any ground whatsoever: and though *the people* be not competent to judge of the means necessary to produce national happiness; yet, to
promote

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promote and advance the prosperity, peace, and freedom of mankind, as much as possible, must ever produce the greatest satisfaction and glory that it is in the power of the greatest men to acquire.

Therefore it is, that, in all reasonings and actions that concern political liberty, the general benefit and felicity of the whole must ever be *a first principle*. But what will be for the general benefit and felicity of the whole, in the various degrees of the civilization of nations, it is not always in the power of the ablest and wisest men, easily to determine. And, as to *the people*, they and their interests and happiness must *naturally* be the subjects in contemplation, which if they were capable of understanding themselves, *the wise and the good of all nations*

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must

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must have given themselves a great deal of unnecessary toil and trouble.

A truly great man cannot but love mankind, because he is a man himself. He feels *the divine laws of human nature* in himself more strongly than others of inferior capacity; and is consequently more sensible of the evils and the distresses, as well as of the advantages and felicities of human life: he therefore will be more able to relieve the *one*, and to promote the *other*. The laws of our nature, which are the work of God, and common to all mankind, are held sacred by him as *the only true foundation* on which all moral and political constitutions ought to be built; and by which the right and wrong of all moral and political laws, and of all forms and powers in governments, can only be estimated.

With

With such principles he must *necessarily* be a true friend of *the just liberty* of the people, and of all mankind. He contemplates their interests and happiness generally and universally : his powerful and inventive mind is full of resources to induce and lead *the people*, through the love and practice of *justice*, to the establishment of *genuine liberty* : *for the perfect liberty of all, depends on the perfect justice of all.* Hence the necessity, in our public institutions, of every kind, for education and manners, of the greatest care and caution, not to introduce any false or *unnatural principles*, as grounds of moral conduct, under any pretence whatever ; for, when their falsties are discovered, (and this is the age of discoveries) they serve only to bring all religion and morality into contempt. But, if such institutions were properly con-

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ducted, they might inspire the young mind with the most ardent affection for all the talents and virtues of their great predecessors, which have been the causes and the support of *that genuine and just liberty*, which in a state of manhood it would be his happiness to enjoy, and his glory to defend.

Though I may very much approve, said I, of what you have been pleased to advance ; yet does not this doctrine tend to authorise and establish the power of *the few*, and to diminish the consequence, and annihilate the power, of *the people* ?

By no means, replied he ; for *the people* are *necessarily* the only object of great consequence in all governments. Where there are no people, there is nothing to govern. We know it has been said of tyrannical governments (and there have been

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been tyrannical governments of every form, from democracy to despotism), that the tyrants are *all*, and the people *nothing*: that is figuratively spoken, and, like all figurative language, never strictly true; for the consequence and power of the people under such governments are more desperately, and more frequently felt, than under any other more moderated form.

A truly free and happily-constituted government feels less of *the dangerous power* and consequence of the people, because they have no enemy to oppose or contend with. Their security, the consequence of the general equity of their government, makes them insensible of any distinct interest from the government; and they will always be much more easily moved to exert their force in the defence, than
in

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in the attack of such good governments. Their vengeance will be directed only against weak, corrupt, or faithless Ministers, whose unpardonable folly, or wickedness, forces the people to *feel* their mal-administration, by the evils they bring upon them ; but not against the government itself.

As to the establishment of the power of *a few*, continued he, such establishment has ever been, and ever must be ; because it is not in the nature of man, or of human society, to be otherwise. Change and modify constitutions and governments into as many forms as it is possible for the human mind to conceive, the legislative and executive parts must always be left in the hands of a few : and, clearly, for the reasons we have given above ; i. e. because but *a few* are at all com-

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competent to the exercise of such high and important employments. That the government of a nation, therefore, is always in the hands of *a few*, can be no objection to its possession of true liberty.

A superior direction in all human affairs, where many are concerned, is naturally necessary ; and men insensibly submit to it of themselves : and they certainly are under the highest obligations, and owe the most sensible gratitude, to those who *with ability and integrity* will undertake and execute *faithfully*, their public or private concerns for them.

It is but a *sorry return to a truly great man*, for such important favours, to be told *malignantly*, that he is but a *servant of the people* ; and to insinuate that his talents and virtues suffer no degradation in being *contemptuously debased* below
the

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the meanest of the people ; as if he were of less importance in nature, or in the state, than those whose interests and happiness depend on his superior understanding.

Such language is well suited to licentiousness and sedition ; but its unprincipled falsity and callous injustice, the effects of *party rage*, are most violent attacks on *genuine liberty*, and tend only to bring it, and every idea of public virtue, into contempt.

The true friends of liberty will be generously just to all men, and with internal satisfaction will acknowledge the merits of all men. They perceive such justice to be necessary to the maintenance, support, and encouragement of all virtue, and consequently of *true liberty*.

Superior talents with integrity, and superior stations legally and properly filled,

filled, will always be objects of respect among the wise and the prudent. They know how necessary to the preservation of order, and good government, such qualifications are ; and how vicious and impolitic it is, to endeavour to degrade, and bring into the contempt of the weak, the ignorant, and the debauched, those virtues and talents, without which no just liberty can exist.

Envy, slander, and the base desire of levelling the best and wisest men, with the most ignorant, vicious, and sordid, are the most prominent features of men who, with the most abandoned *licentiousness* and impudence, have protruded themselves upon the world, as *the only true friends of liberty*, when their whole lives, perhaps, have been a continual invasion of the peace, property, and *liberty* of others,

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by their unbounded extravagance, injustice, and violence; more consonant to rude, barbarian *despotism*, than to that equity and virtue, which are the bonds of affection between man and man, and without which it would be impossible to maintain *the least appearance of liberty among mankind*.

I cannot but acquiesce, said I, in the general tendency of your reasoning : but yet I know you will readily permit me to trouble you with farther enquiries.

There has been lately much said and written about *political Equality* ; and *Liberty and Equality* have been coupled together as terms nearly synonymous, and as if generally well understood : but I must confess, I have not yet heard any definition of the *Equality* intended ; nor in what sense it is meant to be under-

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understood. I remember what you have said upon it in your first Dialogue, and am convinced of its truth. But is it possible to give it any other moral or political sense ?

It requires, replied he, but very little observation, to perceive the *natural inequality of mankind in all their faculties of body and mind*. It is too evident to admit of a moment's doubt. It is also as clearly evident, that the exertion of their faculties, in all their numerous inequalities, must be productive of proportionally unequal effects : consequently, no idea of equality, in those respects, can in their nature exist. The only equality, therefore, that can be admitted, and certainly that ought to be admitted, is that they are created under the *same laws* of their nature universally ; and that they are

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equally entitled to the use and exercise of their corporal and mental faculties in all their various degrees, from the lowest to the highest, *with the utmost freedom*; restrained only by a due regard to the *non-infringement of the freedom of each other*: and the perfection of political laws, for the same reasons, doubtless, is, that they operate *equally* on all men of the same nation, with the most impartial justice.

But when the word *equality* is employed as an engine of meretricious policy, to excite the populace to tumultuous outrage and violence, and to persuade them of a *really natural equality* among men in all respects, mental and corporal, moral and political; and of their right to an *equality* of property, without regard to the just means of acquiring it; what
less

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less can it produce, than the most unbridled licentiousnesses, and the most uncontrollable wickednesses of every description, that can be conceived by the most abandoned of mankind?

Is it not, then, *disgraceful to the cause of liberty*, and to the understandings of mankind, to find so many, who live in a constant and profligate violation of the *liberty, peace, and happiness* of all, who may unfortunately have any personal concerns with them, continually presenting themselves as the most redoubtable patriots; and to find them received, and applauded, as affectionate and strenuous assertors of the just rights and liberties of mankind?

True liberty and vice, continued he, must always be at enmity.—*Licentiousness*, by the vulgar, gross, sensual, and passionate, is generally mistaken for *liberty*;

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erty; but it is perfectly the reverse. The friends of liberty, and the friends of peace, moderation, justice, and every benevolent and manly virtue, are the same persons.

That bad men, of considerable parts, have been *instrumentally* beneficial to liberty, by an abandoned hardness of opposition to laws framed for the restraint and punishment of such characters, because such laws might be extended to men of the best intentions, by a corrupt government, has been seen in all nations and ages; and it may, *perhaps*, be prudent to reward and applaud them. But it would be folly in the extreme, to believe that those men were possessed of that noble affection which comprehends, *cordially*, the true interests and happiness of a nation, whose whole lives have been stained with the filth of the meanest

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meanest vices, and with every sort of injury and injustice to their fellow-citizens.

Certainly, said I, it cannot be disputed, that unjust and wicked men can do no great honour to any cause; nor will it be denied, that to such hands, the sacred deposit of the interests and liberties of a nation should never be confided a moment. But, perhaps, it will not from thence follow, that those who are *frequently* understood to be *virtuous and good men*, will always be found the *best statesmen*, or the *truest friends of liberty*. Has it not often been found, that men of high pretensions, as to ability and character, have proved but very inefficient ministers; and have shewn themselves by no means favourable to the just liberties of mankind?

Many

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Many such men have existed, answered he, and ever will exist; because there will always be men, who from education, or from their own inclination and peculiar turn of mind, collect and combine *notions* of moral virtue and goodness, with religion, or superstition, which every one mixes in his own way, so as to make up a sort of *system* for himself. If they be sincere, they will be fond of their system; and, if fond, they will be zealous to propagate it; and, in the propagation, the warmth of their zeal will often cause them to be forgetful of the respect due to justice, and to truth, and will also make them unconscious of that forgetfulness.

Hence their unsuitness for high stations, and the exercise of great power. They have no universality in their genius and temper. According to their confined
views,

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views, they cannot resist their pious inclinations *to do good*, by enforcing their fanatical systems. If sufficient power were in the possession of *such good men*, the just rights and liberties of mankind must inevitably perish under its holy influence. Their views are too contracted, and their benevolence is too limited, to permit them to extend their faculties to a comprehension of the universal rights and liberties of human nature.

These good men are too certain, and too positive, in their aërial knowledge and opinions, to be really favourable to, or even tolerant of, the general liberty of mankind ; or of any liberty, dissonant in the least from their fond and visionary system. A sort of pious tyranny is inevitable in such minds. They will not so much as allow a man the *liberty* of being con-

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tented when he is so, though he may be ever so much inclined to it : they will insist upon it, that he must be, and ought to be, discontented ; and that it is impossible for him to be long really contented, unless he can be persuaded to adopt their fanaticism in religion and politics.

This distemper of the mind has been an old affliction among mankind ; and has usually shewn itself powerfully among false and fanciful philosophers, and among religionists in ten thousand forms. But it is found every where, and about every thing, when men have not clear and definite ideas.—It now rages with a delirious violence in the political world ; and all former constitutions and governments are to be despised and contemned : we are no longer to profit by experience, nor to edify by the wisdom of the great men
who

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who have gone before us : we are to invert nature, and to be taught the principles of government, by the *sovereign wisdom of the people*, who are to be discharged from all the ties of affinity, and from all the most sacred obligations and duties of society, in order to form new constitutions of liberty, which are to be established by violence and injustice, and by the most destructive outrages *to that only true liberty* which disdains the alliance of *licentiousness* and wickedness.

I perceive, said I, that you are no great admirer of *total revolutions* ; and that your fears of *evil* are much greater, than your hopes of *good*, from them.

But in the present situation of the political world, can liberty ever be obtained and secured without such revolutions ? And is there any thing so much to be

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dreaded from a nation's changing, or new modelling its constitution and form of government ; especially when it is clearly in favour of its own liberty and happiness, and is the result of *its own will*?

To answer satisfactorily your questions, replied he, will require some attention ; and perhaps more clearness and impartiality than I may have the good fortune to possess.

You will consider then what we have already proved, as to the non-existence of a *national mind*. A nation knows nothing of an *united rational will*. *Collectively*, as to propositions concerning constitutions and governments, whether just or unjust, a nation rather *feels* than *understands* them. They are taught by their effects, but know nothing of their principles : and acquiescence and submission, with

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with contentment, are the true indications that their *feelings* are properly and justly gratified ; and that such constitutions and governments are good, and true to nature. But if general discontents and complaints arise *naturally* and *unexcitedly* among a people, the fault must be in the constitutions or governments, or in the executive officers. They must certainly be ill constructed, or ill executed, so to wound the feelings of human nature, and to violate the just rights of mankind. But what are we to infer from thence ? Entire revolution, complete extirpation ? The causes of complaint must be very great indeed, to admit of no alteration, no amendment, short of the most violent extremes. This favours too much of the illiterate and presumptuous quack, who is too ignorant to perceive the innumerable

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rable concatenated causes and effects, which chain mankind together by all the powers and faculties of their nature. They are linked by their affections, passions, interests, pleasures, pains, hopes and fears, in an infinity of ways, which may not be the result of reason, but which are much more powerful than reason. The happiness of mankind arises principally from the agreeable disposition and regulation of all these things, independently of their political situation; which they seldom think about, unless *excited*, or compelled by distress.

Any *entire* revolution, therefore, from one form of government to another, (which is always from one extreme to another), even of the *very best kind*, must give most violent and distressing shocks to the customs, habits, manners, modes of living, and trains of thinking, among a people.

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people. It is so rash and violent, and so out of *the naturally slow, and gradual progression of human minds, and human affairs*, that it must always inevitably be productive of most oppressive injustice, and destructive miseries, in any nation, that, unfortunately, may be made the subject of such empirical experiments.

Nor is it easy to be persuaded of *the wisdom, knowledge, or good intentions*, of men who can work up their minds to such extravagant and adventurous undertakings, fearless of guilt and remorse. Their discernment in human affairs is more than to be suspected; and their *fanaticism* in politics must be beyond a doubt; if they expect to make mankind free and happy, by such monstrous strides as trample on, and destroy, all who oppose,

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pose, or stand in the way of, their *imaginary political perfection*.

They are too inconsiderate to perceive, that if *the most perfect system of government were known*, and could be made the constitution of any nation, yet that perfection could never be understood by *the people*; and that they could have no true or correct apprehension of any such perfection: but that the various and unequal *powers*, or rather *imbecillities* of their minds, would deflect and depart from it, in an infinity of directions, in conformity to their weakness or strength, their ignorance or knowledge: just as they do in religion, in which, *if any one man ever had true and perfect ideas of the Deity, and of the ends of infinite wisdom and power in the creation (which, perhaps, it may not be very presumptuous to say no man ever had,)*

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had), and could reveal them to men in the most explicit manner ; yet the want of capacity in mankind for such high speculations, would totally disable them, as to the conception and understanding of any such revealed or communicated knowledge ; and through an infinity of error, arising from the endless variety and degrees of their capacities, their minds must ever be so full of false and idolatrous ideas, when measured by the *presumed perfection of the only true*, as would make almost as many Gods as there are minds of men.

And thus it is, and ever will be, with regard to *ideas of a perfect constitution, or form of government* : for, if we can *suppose* such perfection were discovered and established, yet it can only be *supposed* of a mind so superior and extraordinary, as to

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be *single* in the human race ; (but it is only a supposition ;) and consequently the perfection would be so high, and so superior to the ordinary faculties of men, with all the weakness, ignorance, and error, that continually float in their minds, as to be scarcely at all applicable to the natural infirmities of the creature ; and, if *rigorously* enforced, might become the severest tyranny and oppression, considering his ignorance, and inability to understand and practise any such elevated perfection.

It signifies but little, what high ideas of *perfection* some men may entertain of constitutions and governments : *the capacity* and progressional improvements of the people, who are to receive them, must always be the object of *primary consideration* ; and there is not *a chance of a whole nation's*

nation's sensibility of them, even when arrived at the highest degree of civilisation and knowledge which it is possible for any nation to attain: and at every inferior degree; the high and perfect constitution and government, must descend to that degree, at which any nation may be found, or it can be of but little practical use; and may prove, if rigorously insisted on, much more injurious than beneficial to the existing circumstances and felicity of a nation.

A nation which has already attained a very high degree of civilisation, and a knowledge of the useful, elegant, and ornamental arts of life, *under any form of government*, must, *upon a total revolution* to an opposite extreme, be thrown back to a considerable distance, with regard to those advantages; because they could

not have attained so much, without some rooted and favourable circumstances in their old government ; though in some respects it may have been a very bad one.

Men who can believe the possibility of a nation's advancement to a high degree of civilisation and knowledge, *suddenly, or in a short time*, must be very inattentive to daily experience, and to the experience of all ages. Their *ignorance* is indisputable. But, if such notions be propagated with a view only to create discontent in the minds of men with their present condition, and to prepare them for political revolutions, ruinous to their country, and destructive to themselves, there cannot be a doubt of the diabolical *wickedness* of such propagators.

Every sort of knowledge in man is progressional and gradual ; though very
unequally

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unequally so, among individuals, and among nations ; yet, the great body of the people in nations being *naturally incapable* of considerable acquirements, their progress is very slow, and very limited : *slow*, because of the dulness and hebetation of their faculties ; and *limited*, because the object of such faculties extends very little beyond *present convenience* ; and present convenience may be, and has been, enjoyed under almost every form of government. A government entirely inimical to humanity cannot exist.

But, as the civilisation and happiness of nations can never be advanced by an indolence that looks no farther than present exigencies, exertion with knowledge is indispensably necessary to their acquirement ; and exertion with knowledge must have existed in every nation,
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and under every form of government, that has ever attained a high degree of civilisation, and polished humanity of manners. And, if such felicitous advantages could never be obtained in nations, without the existence of a very considerable degree of liberty in its constitution, or government, (which scarcely admits of a doubt) then there must exist *degrees of liberty*, either legal, or tolerated, in all constitutions, or governments, in proportion to their advancement in civilisation; though perhaps the perfection of liberty may be enjoyed by none. Indeed human nature is incapable of such perfection.

Do you think, then, said I, *with indifference* about the establishment of constitutions, and forms of governments? Are not some much preferable to others, and well worth contending for?

If,

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If, as has been just shewn, (answered he,) there be various degrees of liberty in nations, *either legal, or tolerated*, in proportion to their civilization, as a lover of *true liberty*, you may be sure I would choose the *bigbest legal degree* that could be obtained without injustice and cruelty. A constitution and form of government, wisely and cautiously established, *such as the English is*, has a natural tendency in itself to produce every *degree of liberty* a nation may be capable of receiving in a regular progression to the *bigbest degree*, without any guilty violence, and without dangerous interferences, from mal-contented, who labour to involve a happy people in discontent and misery, because they feel themselves dissatisfied with their own ungovernable *fanaticism*, or with a deficiency of all *principle* in morals and politics.

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Indifference must, doubtless, be very criminal, concerning the constitution and government *of our own country*. But certainly a forward interference in the *internal business and government of other nations unnecessarily*, must always be unjustifiable. Reforms and revolutions have expanded into *Quixotism*, and propagation, into *Jesuitism* and *Crusades*, in a neighbouring nation.

Coolness is indispensably necessary in the search of truth : we must, therefore, farther observe, that every nation *naturally* comprehends in itself, a mixture of all the forms of government, which men discourse of, under the various names of *monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and the like* : for *such powers*, in every nation, and under every form of government, must find their place of action, in
which

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which they will exert themselves with such energy as they may severally possess. For, however correctly men may form ideas, and fix them to these words, as really and accurately significant of the *simple existence* of any such governments as they are usually meant to describe, yet no such correctness ever existed in nations, or in human nature.

And this is another instance of the abuse of words, which are supposed to represent what has no existence in nature; for there never was a *simple* monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy, or democracy, in the world.

And as to the word *republic*, though it be usually applied to every government without a King, yet, in its original and true signification, (*the public weal*) some Kings, at least, have so well understood,

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and attended to the *public weal*, that their governments might much more justly merit the appellation of *republican*, than many of those which are always denominated republican, though often severe and tyrannical enemies to the *public weal*, and liberties of their countries.

A King wisely and justly limited, (names apart,) is but the first republican in a free nation; and it is not very easy to conceive, how he can have any *substantial interest* separate from it; and much less against it, since himself, and his successors, can have no rational hope of satisfaction, or security, but in its prosperity and duration. It is his home and his country, at least in as high, and as clear a sense, as it can be that of any other man.

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It should seem, then, said I, that the words, *kings, aristocrats, or democrats*, excite but little of your serious attention in a philosophical survey of constitutions and governments; and that you have no very strong partialities for the one, more than the other.

Why, you know, replied he, strong partialities, or any partialities, in the search of truth, are just so many obstacles in the way of our perception of it. They are true signs of a deficient judgment, and of an intemperate mind. Truth cannot be discerned through such clouds. You need not be told, that *mere words* of uncertain and indefinite signification, are not worthy of much respect: for, being indefinite, they are the causes of much confusion, and of eternal error.

What a philosopher must he be, who

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can hate, or love *kings, aristocrats, or democrats* in the aggregate, with no other distinction than the name ; and can arrange a nation, at his pleasure, under such names, regardless of the infinite variety of the human character, and of every principle of humanity and justice; and then can provoke them to the mutual contempt, hatred, and destruction of each other !

The true philosopher, the true friend of mankind, knows that neither liberty, nor happiness, can be obtained or secured on such superficial and diabolical principles. *To do evil that good may come of it*, seems to be the hardy political *jesuitism* of these adventurous and malignant reformers.

Men who look into themselves, must easily perceive, that human happiness cannot

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cannot be found in the exercise of violent, contentious, and malevolent passions; nor in exciting among men, in their various orders and stations, discontent, envy, and aversion. None but the *enemies of the liberty* and of the peace of mankind, employ themselves in such wicked and destructive pursuits; and it well becomes every man, in any *tolerably free country*, to consider them, and treat them, as enemies. But in a country like ours, where the *moral liberty* of every man feels no restraint, and where *political liberty* is established more firmly, and with fewer faults, than in any other nation in the world, it must provoke the indignation and disdain of every rational and honest man among us, to suppose such a country, with *so many truly great men in it*, to stand in need of the aid of *empirical arrogance*,

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gance, and *perverse fanaticism*, to enable us to rectify the *few faults* that may have crept into it, by the progressive changes which have been wrought by all-corroding time.

Other nations have, doubtless, suffered much and long, under arbitrary and despotic authorities ; and considerable alterations may be found necessary to give them *such a degree of liberty* as they ought, or may be prepared to receive ; for *that* has always been a principal object of consideration among wise legislators. But the *genuine liberty* enjoyed under *the British constitution*, has so long, and so universally been acknowledged, admired, and praised, by all the wisest and greatest men in all the nations of Europe, that nothing can exceed the *folly* of those who can believe the necessity of any material change

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change in our *constitution*, as likely to be productive of a more perfect liberty ; nor can any thing exceed the *ignorance and impudence* of those who affirm that we have *no constitution at all* ; and consequently no legal, or established liberty. If it were not for the *dangerous industry* with which such *notions* have been propagated among *the least intelligent of the people*, for the most nefarious and ruinous purposes ; could any thing be more ridiculous and contemptible ?

Indeed, I begin to think so, answered I ; and to be convinced of the *falsity of the boasted popular principles* of the present great political reformers and revolutionists in Europe : for, doubtless, nothing can be more clear than the incapacity of *the people*, in the great moral and political concerns of mankind, as you have explained

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explained it. But do not the people *appear* to exercise a very considerable degree of power, in an election of their representatives? and ought we not to believe so favourably of the general intentions of *the people* in their *free* and *uninfluenced elections*, as to give them credit for a *sense* of public interest and public virtue?

To refer you, answered he, to the general conduct of *the people* at elections, might be thought too short a way of deciding such questions. But experience is the most authentic teacher: and from her we learn the extreme weakness and corruptibility of *the people* at elections. They are still led by *a few*, who can induce them, or overawe them, to give or sell their votes; and most certainly with very little regard to *public interest*, *character*, or *talents*. The various contrivances

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trivances that are in use among men for balloting and voting, to prevent such general corruption, are so many proofs of the fact. In such conduct we perceive but *very little sense* of public virtue. As to the power, individually, it is *small*; but unitedly, it is *great*; and if it could be exercised justly and independently, and directed to its proper object, which should be the election of the *best* and *wisest* men among them, for their representatives, it would certainly then become a most respectable power indeed. But here, again, nature opposes our hopeful theory. A nation, it seems, is incapable of such correctness and virtue.

We deny not that *the people* ought to possess *the power*; but the mode in which they should exercise it, with propriety and public utility, must be discovered and

prescribed by *superior minds*. They can perform the simple act of power; but they cannot extend their views to the great political consequences, nor comprehend the general interests and happiness of a nation. It is, doubtless, a power which ought always to remain with *the people* in a free country; but, certainly the greatest caution and wisdom are required, to restrain its *licentiousness*, and to direct it to its only proper object, *a free and impartial election*.

I must confess myself thus far satisfied, replied I; yet I could continue my interrogations much longer, were it not an unreasonable intrusion on your time and patience. I will therefore only once more trouble you for your opinion on what is *commonly* understood by *opposition*

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